



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
RANKING MEMBER BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources; Ashley Nichols
Ashley.Nichols@mail.house.gov (202-226-3044), Rebecca Konolige -
Rebecca.Konolige@mail.house.gov (202-226-1879) and Rob MacGregor -
Robert.MacGregor@mail.house.gov (202-424-9615)
Date: February 14, 2022
Subject: Legislative Hearing on H.R. 6654 (Grijalva), the Climate Adaptation Science Centers Act: “*Securing the Future of Climate Adaptation Science at the United States Geological Survey*”

On Thursday, February 17, 2022, at 1:00 pm EST, in room 1324 Longworth House Office Building and online via Cisco WebEx, the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will hold a legislative hearing on H.R. 6654 (Grijalva), the Climate Adaptation Science Centers Act, titled, “*Securing the Future of Climate Adaptation Science at the United States Geological Survey.*”

Member offices are requested to notify Ashley Nichols no later than **Wednesday, February 16, at 4:30 p.m. EST**, if their Member intends to participate via his/her laptop in the committee room or remotely from another location. Submissions for the hearing record must be submitted through the Committee’s electronic repository at HNRCDocs@mail.house.gov. Please contact David DeMarco (David.DeMarco@mail.house.gov) or Everett Winnick (Everett.Winnick@mail.house.gov) should any technical difficulties arise.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- The Climate Adaptation Science Centers (CASCs), a program under the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), consists of one national center and nine regional centers, intended to assist research efforts to support land management planning for environmental and climate-related issues.
- The regional centers are directed to focus on geographically relevant topics, including drought, coastal erosion, wildfires, and permafrost, depending on the area. Other CASC partnerships may include state and county land managers, federal agencies, tribes, and non-governmental organizations.
- The Climate Adaptation Science Centers Act (H.R. 6654, the “CASC Act”), introduced by Chairman Grijalva, would authorize the program at a total of \$605 million over five years, with no controls for overhead costs. This would nearly triple the funding of the program compared to the FY21 appropriated level of \$41.3 million.



- This significant increase in funding and lack of overhead limitations included in the CASC Act presents concerns regarding accountability to the taxpayers and oversight of the program. The expansion and vagueness of eligible research areas also generates concerns regarding overlap with existing federal programs, as well as a departure from the original intent of the CASC program.

II. WITNESSES

Panel I

- Dr. Douglas T. Beard, Jr., Chief of the National Climate Adaptation Science Center, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

Panel II

- Scott Cameron, Former Acting Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget, U.S. Department of the Interior, Senior Advisor, Cornea, Inc., Alexandria, VA
[Republican Witness]
- Mr. Doug Austen, Executive Director, American Fisheries Society, Enola, PA
- Mr. Chris Caldwell, Director and President, College of Menominee Nation, Keshena, WI
- Dr. Renee A. McPherson, University Director for the South Central Climate Adaptation Science Center, Associate Professor of Geography and Environmental Sustainability, the University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK

III. BACKGROUND

Program Overview and History: The self-described mission of the CASCs is “to deliver science to help fish, wildlife, water, land, and people adapt to a changing climate.”¹ This program works with land managers and other stakeholders to perform research for land management and climate adaptation decisions.² Congress established the National Climate Adaptation Science Center (NCASC) in 2008.³ In 2009, then-Secretary Salazar released Secretarial Order No. 3289, which emphasized the Department of the Interior’s role in environmental protection, and called for a Department-wide approach to understanding and responding to climate change impacts.⁴ As part of that effort, the secretarial order designated regional “hubs” as Regional Climate Change Response Centers, and tasked them with developing tools to help land managers address the effects of a changing climate.⁵ In 2018, the centers were renamed the Climate Adaptation Science Centers, and today there are nine regional CASCs

¹ U.S. Geological Survey, Climate Adaptation Science Centers, About, <https://www.usgs.gov/programs/climate-adaptation-science-centers/about>.

² *Id.*

³ U.S. Geological Survey, Climate Adaptation Science Centers, History of the CASCs, <https://www.usgs.gov/programs/climate-adaptation-science-centers/history-casc>.

⁴ Secretary of the Interior, Order No. 3289, September 14, 2009. <https://d9-wret.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets/palladium/production/s3fs-public/atoms/files/SecOrder3289.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.*

managed by one national CASC.⁶ The nine regions are Alaska, Midwest, North Central, Northeast, Northwest, Pacific Islands, South Central, Southeast, and Southwest.⁷

Program Structure and Funding Distribution: Congress appropriates funding to the National CASC on an annual basis. A portion of that funding stays at the National CASC, with the remainder divided amongst the nine regions.⁸ From there, research is funded through two mechanisms. First, approximately \$4.5 million is provided to each host university over a five-year period for cooperative agreements between the host university and USGS. This funding is for the physical location of the CASC and salaries for graduate and post-doctorate students to assist in research efforts.⁹ The five-year science agenda under these cooperative agreements is largely formed by the partnership and stakeholder outreach process. Host universities are subject to an internal performance review annually, with an external review taking place at the end of each five-year cooperative agreement.¹⁰

The vast majority of the research is performed through a second method, in which regional CASCs each select one annual research project to fund.¹¹ Once funding is distributed to the regions from the National CASC, the director of each region releases a call for proposals.¹² Once input is received from their respective advisory committees, the director of each Regional CASC determines which project will be researched and funded.¹³ The directors of the regional CASCs have significant discretion over the project selection process. The lack of standardization of methodology for project prioritization provides significant oversight challenges making it difficult for Congress to determine if research topics are properly prioritized and ensure good stewardship of taxpayer dollars.¹⁴

Partnerships: Since the main purpose of the CASCs is to provide land and resource managers with useable data, this program involves a large network of federal and non-federal partnerships throughout the country. Federal agency partnerships may include the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the National Park Service (NPS), the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Office of Insular Affairs, as well as occasional federal partners outside of DOI.¹⁵ Other governmental partners include states, counties, and tribes.¹⁶ Regional CASCs also partner with universities, including a “host” university for every regional center. Non-governmental organizations may also include conservation groups such as The Nature Conservancy.¹⁷ The lack of

⁶ U.S. Geological Survey, Climate Adaptation Science Centers, History of the CASCs, <https://www.usgs.gov/programs/climate-adaptation-science-centers/history-cascs>.

⁷ U.S. Geological Survey, Climate Adaptation Science Centers, Learn About the Regional CASCs, <https://www.usgs.gov/programs/climate-adaptation-science-centers/learn-about-regional-cascs>.

⁸ Staff briefing from Janet Cushing, Deputy Chief of National Climate Adaptation Science Center, U.S. Geological Survey, February 8, 2022.

⁹ Staff briefing from Janet Cushing, Deputy Chief of National Climate Adaptation Science Center, U.S. Geological Survey, February 8, 2022.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ U.S. Geological Survey, Climate Adaptation Science Centers, Meet Our Partners, <https://www.usgs.gov/programs/climate-adaptation-science-centers-program/meet-our-partners>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ U.S. Geological Survey, Climate Adaptation Science Centers, CASC Partnerships with Non-Profits and Conservation Organizations, <https://www.usgs.gov/programs/climate-adaptation-science-centers/casc-partnerships-non-profits-and-conservation>

transparency around how these projects are selected may allow for outsized influence of NGOs and therefore bias the topics selected as well as outcomes.

Partnership groups, often referred to as “consortiums,” consist of some combination of government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and universities. The groups may vary in size and configuration.¹⁸ Partnerships play a significant role in informing the CASCs about how to focus their research priorities. CASCs go through a survey process with their various stakeholders to assess their highest priorities for study. Feedback from the survey is subsequently built into five-year science agendas for each host university and used to inform annual projects selections by each Regional CASC.¹⁹

Proposed Increase in Program Funding: The FY22 USGS budget request for the CASC program was \$84.4 million, representing an increase of over \$43 million from the FY21 enacted level of \$41.3 million.²⁰ The budget justification breaks down the program funding into four main purposes: “1) Tribal Climate Adaptation Science, 2) Support for Climate Adaptation Science Centers, 3) Facilitating the Synthesis of Regional Findings to the National Level, and 4) Assessment of Biological Diversity.”²¹ Of these four groups, the largest increases by far were in Support for Climate Adaptation Science Centers (from approximately \$3 million to \$28 million) and Tribal Climate Adaptation Science (from \$500,000 to \$10 million).²²

According to the budget justification, the highest funded program goal, Support for Climate Adaptation Science Centers, would apply the requested \$25 million increase to “furthering ongoing work in support of the climate science needs identified in the DOI Climate Action plan; and ramping up efforts by our regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers (CASC) stakeholder advisory committees.”²³ Additionally, this increased budget would be used for “support in the intersection between climate science and natural and cultural resource management...these services would ensure management agencies could integrate the best available climate science into everyday activities.”²⁴

Given that the core goal of the CASCs is to study local climate conditions for land management planning, some may have concerns that “integrating” climate science into everyday land management activities may go beyond what the program was originally designed to do and duplicate existing federal programs and research.

The introduced text of H.R. 5376, the Democrats’ “Build Back Better Act”, included \$100 million for the Climate Adaptation Science Centers over the FY22 - FY31 period “to provide localized information to help communities respond to climate change.”

The CASC Act, under consideration at this hearing, authorizes the program at a level of \$97 million for FY23, \$109 million for FY24, \$121 million for FY25, \$133 million for FY26, and \$145 million for

¹⁸ Staff briefing from Gregg Garfin, University Director, Southwest CASC and Darren Lerner, Consortium Director, Pacific Islands CASC, January 28, 2022.

¹⁹ *Supra* n. 9.

²⁰ U.S. Geological Survey, Budget Justification Fiscal Year 2022, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2022-usgs-budget-justification.pdf>.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

FY27. USGS has cited growing demand for climate adaptation data, as well as questions from land managers on how to apply it, as the rationale for the major program increases although it remains unclear exactly how this additional funding will be utilized.²⁵ This lack of clarity presents significant concerns regarding accountability to the taxpayers, especially given the fact that there is no restriction on overhead and in light of the broad program goals listed in the budget justification.

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS

- Establishes National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers, administered by the U.S. Geological Survey, to provide scientific expertise to managers of natural resources, cultural resources, and ecosystem services to inform decisions that aid adaptation to a changing climate and extreme weather events.
 - Duties of the National Center: serve as national office for Regional Centers and provide them with leadership and support, facilitate coordination among the Regional Centers and between federal agencies performing similar research, evaluate the performance of Regional Centers every 5 years, allocate funding among the Regional Centers
 - Authorities of the National Center: may procure the services of public and private entities to conduct its work, may operate not fewer than nine Regional Centers
- The National Center shall establish guidelines for the activities and responsibilities of the Regional Centers, including 1) requirements for the merit review of Regional Centers, 2) circumstances by which a host institution may not be continued as a host institution, 3) the schedule for reviews, 4) the process to select a new host institution.
- Committees, subcommittees, and working groups shall not be subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act.
- In collaboration with federal, state, tribal, and non-governmental partners, Regional Centers shall develop research, education, training, and advisory service priorities regarding the impacts of climate trends and variability on natural and cultural resource management in their regions for the purpose of climate adaptation.
- USGS may enter into contracts, grants, or other cooperative agreements with a host institution or consortium institution to further research and related activities.
 - Any federal agency may participate in such agreements by contributing funds.
- Any entity of the federal government engaged in, concerned with, or that has authority over matters relating to natural and cultural resources, ecosystem services, or climate variability or changes may make any personnel, service or facility, available which the Chief of the National Center deems necessary; shall provide any data as requested by the Secretary; shall cooperate with the National and Regional Centers; may transfer funds or enter into interagency agreements to transfer resources between the National Center or Regional Centers to aid collaboration between agencies, if approved by the Chief of the National Center and the other federal agency.
- The Chief of the National Center may establish committees or working groups and procedures to facilitate public participation in the advisory process.
- The Secretary shall establish an Advisory Committee on Climate and Natural Resource Sciences, subject to Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).
 - The Committee shall not have fewer than 15 members.

²⁵ *Id.*

- Each member shall be an employee of an Indian tribe, a tribal organization, a Native Hawaiian organization, a state or local government, a host institution of a regional center, a nongovernmental organization, an academic institution, or an organization of the private sector.
 - The Committee shall identify and recommend priorities for ongoing research needs to inform the National Center.
- At the discretion of the Secretary, the Chief of the National Center may establish committees or working groups to provide input on science priorities, implementation of priorities, review of proposals, and evaluation of processes and outcomes of the National and Regional Centers.
- The Secretary may establish procedures to facilitate public participation in the advisory process.
 - Any such procedures shall be adopted, maintained, and available to the public.
- Committees and working groups shall not be considered advisory committees under FACA.
- There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry out this Act not less than:
 - \$97,000,000 for fiscal year 2023;
 - \$109,000,000 for fiscal year 2024;
 - \$121,000,000 for fiscal year 2025;
 - \$133,000,000 for fiscal year 2026; and
 - \$145,000,000 for fiscal year 2027.